CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-THIRD PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 23 August 2001, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Roberto Betancourt Ruales (Ecuador)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish). I declare open the 883rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset I should like to extend a cordial welcome, on behalf of all the members of the Conference on Disarmament, to Ambassador Toufik Salloum, who has assumed responsibility as the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to assure him of our full cooperation and support.

I have only one speaker on my list for today but, before giving him the floor, I would like first to make an opening statement on Ecuador's assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

Ambassadors, Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen: allow me to say that I feel extremely honoured at the privilege, as representative of Ecuador, of taking over the presidency of this body, the key multilateral forum for negotiations in the field of disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and arms control. This is the first time that Ecuador has assumed this honour, having been accepted as a member of the Conference on Disarmament in 1999, the year when my country finally achieved this long-standing aspiration of its foreign policy, the fulfilment of 16 years of waiting and untiring effort.

Ecuador joined the Conference on Disarmament in the belief that a world free of nuclear weapons is not only a dream but an urgent necessity and that this organization is able to take care of the security requirements of all States and, in particular, to safeguard the rights of those that do not possess nuclear weapons.

Ecuador supports objectives such as the intensitifiation and irreversibility of the nuclear disarmament process through the elimination and destruction of those weapons. It has backed international efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament and is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. My country has supported specific initiatives, such as the convening of an international conference to determine the best ways of eliminating nuclear risks.

Ecuador is in favour of the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones, because it believes that such zones strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation system and contribute to the achievement of nuclear disarmament. In this conviction, Ecuador took an active part in preparing the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which declared Latin America a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In 1999, Ecuador coordinated the working group of the United Nations Disarmament Commission which set out guidelines for the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

As I assume this delicate responsibility, I feel bound to acknowledge the skilful and creative work undertaken in the exploration of options and holding of consultations by the former presidents of the Conference on Disarmament in their endeavour to build the necessary consensus to approve a programme of work for the Conference. Special mention should be made of the valuable contribution of the distinguished Latin American diplomat, Ambassador Camilo Reyes of Colombia, who led the members of the Conference on

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Disarmament in adopting the decision to appoint three special coordinators. That decision merited due recognition by the members, as it provides a mechanism which, we hope, will be a valuable contribution to the future of the Conference. I therefore feel that it should be preserved in the general interest. I shall make sure that the decision is included in the next report of the Conference on Disarmament to the United Nations General Assembly.

On taking over the presidency, Ecuador notes with deep concern that, notwithstanding the considerable diplomatic efforts made by the previous 18 presidents of the Conference on Disarmament, who have held this office since 1999, it has not been possible to reverse the situation of paralysis which prevails within this body, in which serious differences regarding crucial matters are threatening the very raison d'être of the Conference and rendering it impossible for us to approve its programme of work.

This situation notwithstanding, we renew our trust and support all efforts aimed at reactivating the purpose for which the Conference on Disarmament was created. The Conference has a very clear mandate to promote and preserve international peace and security through the elimination of nuclear weapons and arms reduction and control.

During the period of Ecuador's presidency, no changes are expected in the climate of stagnation described earlier, especially since the strategic scenario and international security situation still appear broadly responsible for determining progress towards any form of consensus.

We are approaching the end of the third part of the Conference's 2001 session and the prospects for moving ahead with the treatment of substantive matters do not appear encouraging. Nevertheless, it would not be reasonable to exclude the possibility in the future of arriving at a new consensus decision which would allow us to move forward along the road that lies ahead before the Conference on Disarmament. In any event, I believe that in the time available we shall be able only to prepare the ground for next year's session.

Aware of our responsibility, we reaffirm our undertaking to work towards reactivating the purpose of the Conference on Disarmament and, in particular, its capacity for action. To this end, Ecuador will explore all consultation mechanisms at its disposal.

In this spirit, and using as a basis the proposal contained in document CD/1624 submitted by Ambassador Amorim, together with the valuable recommendations of the presidents of the Conference on Disarmament who preceded me in this office, I propose to continue undertaking consultations with a view to identifying possible ways of arriving at a consensus for agreeing on a programme of work for the Conference.

In addition, in response to the recommendation put forward by the distinguished Cuban Ambassador, Mr. Carlos Amat Forés, aimed at maintaining activities within the small area of discussion and negotiation established in the framework of action of the three special coordinators, I should like, in consultation with delegations, to identify the best formula for ensuring that this work should continue and to find out how the members of the Conference on Disarmament would like to deal with the first reports on those activities.

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In any event, it is clear that the work of the coordinators, which is fully supported by this presidency and by the members of the Conference on Disarmament, can in no way replace the main activity for which the Conference on Disarmament is responsible with respect to the substantive matters of the programme of work.

I should like to express my thanks to the distinguished Cuban Ambassador, Mr. Carlos Amat Forés, my predecessor, for his intensive efforts to promote a consensus with regard to agreeing on a programme of work and for allowing me to share the valuable information which he gathered in the course of his consultations. Finally, I should like to thank all delegations for the support which, I feel sure, you will give to the presidency.

I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Belgium.

Mr. LINT (Belgium) (translated from French): Mr. President, I should like, first of all, to congratulate you on your assumption of the office of President of the Conference on Disarmament. You may be assured that you can count on the full cooperation of Belgium in your new office.

I have taken the floor to inform the Conference that, in their capacity as co-chairs of the Standing Committee of Experts on the General Status and Operation of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, Zimbabwe and Belgium will be organizing, in conjunction with Nicaragua, an information meeting on the Third Meeting of the States parties, to be held in Managua from 18 to 21 September 2001.

The information meeting will be held on 29 August from 2 to 3 p.m., in room VII at the Palais des Nations. All delegations are invited to attend. On that occasion they will receive all the Conference documents that are currently available.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that, to date, 118 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention and 140 States have signed, ratified or acceded to it. Belgium encourages all States which are not yet parties to the Convention to ratify it and to accede to it as soon as possible.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Belgium for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

Is there any other delegation which wishes to take the floor?

As this does not appear to be the case, I would like to recall that, with regard to the timetable of meetings for the coming weeks, the Conference shall hold two plenary meetings next week, in accordance with paragraph 4 of the decision on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament contained in document CD/1036.

In this connection, the secretariat has informed me that both the Special Coordinator on the Improved and Effective Functioning of the Conference, Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam of Sri Lanka, and the Special Coordinator on the Expansion of the Membership of the Conference,

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Ambassador Petko Draganov of Bulgaria, or a member of his delegation acting on his behalf, intend to submit their respective reports on the Conference on Tuesday, 28 August 2001. Accordingly, in addition to the plenary meeting on Thursday, 30 August 2001, another plenary meeting will be scheduled on Tuesday, 28 August 2001, to accommodate their requests.

Before adjourning the meeting, I would like to recall that, as announced last Thursday, the Special Coordinator, Ambassador Günther Seibert of Germany, will convene, immediately after this plenary meeting, informal open-ended consultations on the review of the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament.

That concludes our business for today.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.